



faculty of social
sciences, arts
and humanities

43/2023

Research Journal
Studies about Languages
pp. 14–28

ISSN 1648-2824 (print)

ISSN 2029-7203 (online)

DOI 10.5755/j01.sal.1.43.33284

LINGUISTICS / KALBOTYRA

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Received 01/2023

Accepted 09/2023

HOW TO CITE: Kramar, N., & Ilchenko, O. (2023). Neologisms in the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the context of information warfare. *Studies about Languages / Kalbų studijos*, 43, 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.1.43.33284>

Neologisms in the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in the context of information warfare

Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo neologizmai kaip informacinio
karo priemonė žiniasklaidoje

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Abstract

The article delves into English neologisms associated with the Russia-Ukraine war, which gained significant media prominence from its onset on February 24, 2022, until the end of 2022. The following categories were identified: 1) lexical neologisms, which first appeared after the beginning of the war, e.g., *sanctionista*, *Zelensky-washing*, *Putinflation*, etc.; 2) semantic neologisms, which existed before the war but acquired new meanings due to it, e.g., *deputinization*, *digital blockade*, etc.; 3) re-actualized lexical units, which were sporadically used up to 2022 but gained renewed relevance and additional contextual valency in the context of the war, e.g., *ruscism*, *stalinization*, etc. Some of the neologisms under study were first coined in the Ukrainian or Russian languages and subsequently spread to other languages (e.g., *missile terrorism*), while others are limited to English only and have no equivalents in either Ukrainian or Russian (e.g., *sanctionista*). Focusing on the media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war, we trace the etymology of the identified neologisms, their recurrence, and context of usage, as well as the pragmatic value they have in shaping public stances on the war in Western countries. We also take into consideration humorous neologisms that trended on social media during this period of the war, providing a way of releasing tension while also contributing to Ukrainian information warfare and fundraising purposes. The study is instrumental in driving our understanding of the role of linguistic creativity in the media framing of emotionally loaded and potentially divisive political issues.

KEYWORDS: Russia-Ukraine war, lexical neologism, semantic neologism, information warfare, media.

Introduction

Every year, English is enriched with thousands of neologisms, some of them transient, others more persistent. One of the key sources of new words is significant social and political events that have a profound impact on people's lives and worldviews. Thus, quite recently, we have witnessed an unprecedented burst of linguistic creativity caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has shaken the world's status quo to the core. Numerous studies focused on the so-called "coroneologisms" reveal the wide variety of formation patterns and source domains for these neologisms, which, although mostly playful, have presented an important coping mechanism helping society to deal with the stress of the pandemic (Alyeksyeyeva, Chaiuk & Galitska, 2020; Khalfan, Batool & Shehzad, 2020; Roig-Marín, 2021). A few years earlier, English had a colossal influx of new words related to Brexit, running the gamut of emotions from triumph to regret over it (Lalić-Krstin & Silaški, 2018). The coming to power of Donald Trump in the US and the tumultuous period of his presidency also engendered a wealth of neologisms such as *trumpism*, *trumpist*, *trumponomics*, *trumpkin* and the like (Kean, 2017).

In 2022, the key political event that shocked the world with deep repercussions for social and economic dimensions was undoubtedly the Russia-Ukraine war. The largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, it presented humanity with severe challenges, including threats to global energy and food security, as well as nuclear safety. This study seeks to address various kinds of neologisms of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, as well as the lexical units that were re-actualized due to it. Beyond discussing their etymology, history of usage, and word-formation patterns, we purport to identify their broader implications and discuss their influence as an opinion-shaping instrument in the information war that was deployed between Russia, on the one hand, and Ukraine and its ally countries, on the other.

Theoretical Background

The use of language in the context of war has been primarily investigated from the perspective of language weaponization. This construct – which emerged in military studies in the 1950s and is now gaining momentum in political sciences – implies the use of language with the purpose of inflicting harm on others and is often applied to propaganda, disinformation, and censorship in both military and non-military confrontations (McConnell-Ginet, 2020; Pascal, 2019; Rafael, 2016; Stahl, 2016). Weaponized language is intended to dehumanize minority groups, vilify those seen as disloyal, and shape public beliefs that would render systematic atrocities acceptable (Pascal, 2019). One of the relevant studies addressed the weaponization of language by the Kremlin in Russian-language digital media during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2014 Crimean annexation (Lupion, 2018).

Furthermore, it has been observed that military conflicts often bring about the creation of new words and expressions to convey novel ideas and give way to the overwhelming emotions caused by the fighting. In their 2014 book *The Word at War: World War Two in 100 Phrases*, Philip Gooden and Peter Lewis state that "in warfare, the new and unfamiliar require fresh terminology, while fear and frustration provide plenty of excuse for (often surprisingly detailed and inventive) cusswords" (Gooden & Lewis, 2014). The authors analyze some of the neologisms of World War II that have become deeply ingrained in the English language and culture of English-speaking countries, including *flak*, *spam*, *kamikaze*, *Dunkirk spirit*, and even the still-popular meme *keep calm and carry on*. This highlights the potential for neologisms born amid military conflict to achieve widespread usage and cultural significance, warranting thorough linguistic analysis.

Ukrainian war-related neologisms have received significant elucidation in linguistic research, with a particular focus on derogatory and slang terms (see, for example, Styshov, 2022; Kovalchuk & Litkovych, 2022). Remarkably, an overview of new Ukrainian words coined during the war appeared in the American newspaper *Politico* (Sheftalovych, 2022). Contrariwise, English-language neologisms of the Russia-Ukraine war have not received profound scholarly attention yet beyond the discussion of *ruscism*, which is often claimed as a new word born in this war (Snyder, 2022). However, as emphasized in our study, it falls into the category of words that existed previously but experienced a resurgence in 2022, becoming much more prevalent in political discourse.

For the purposes of our study, it is important to discuss the terminological issues involved and, specifically, to clarify the distinction between neologisms and occasionalisms (or nonce words). It is generally accepted that an occasionalism is coined for some particular context and does not evolve into a permanent vocabulary item (Bauer, 2001). Hans-Jörg Schmid addresses the establishment of neologisms by breaking it down into three stages: lexicalization, institutionalization, and entrenchment (Schmid, 2011, pp. 71–80). Viewed in these terms, an occasionalism typically does not move past the stage of lexicalization, while neologisms develop further to become entrenched and even enter authoritative dictionaries. Still, scholars note that some new coinages “remain borderline cases between nonce formations and true neologisms” (Mattiello, 2017, p. 26). Within the frame of our study, we address the novel lexical units that have been used at least in two different sources, i.e., they are not occasionalisms created for one particular case only. We use the term “lexical unit” rather than “word” throughout the article due to the fact that many of the neologisms under study are multi-word sequences (comprised of two or three words) that convey a single meaning.

Another terminological distinction worth mentioning is lexical vs. semantic neologisms. While lexical neologisms are newly formed words, semantic neologisms, or neosemanticisms, are words that acquire additional meaning in the course of their evolution (Renouf, 2013). Anja Schüler notes that this process can be accompanied by generalization, concretization, or metaphorical transformation of the term’s original meaning (Schüler, 2006). Identification and analysis of such terms require careful examination of the context of their usage in comparison with a defined past period. Finally, some classifications of neologisms distinguish between items created ex nihilo (root creations) and those based upon an existing linguistic model (derivational neologisms) (Szymanek, 2005). Within the latter type, the prominent role in English word-formation is played by analogy, as was proven by Elisa Mattiello (2017). In our study, we took into consideration the structural patterns of the identified neologisms, tracing the schemas they rely on and interpreting their media framing implications.

In addition to the war-related neologisms that appeared or acquired new meanings in 2022, we also identify the terms that were used previously but gained renewed relevance during the war, with their semantics delineating more clearly and their usage in the media becoming much more common. In terms of Schmid (2011, pp. 71–80), these neologisms have now moved from the stage of lexicalization to the stages of institutionalization and entrenchment. Though they are relatively recent (created over the last two decades), we refer to them as “re-actualized lexical units” to set a demarcation with neologisms of the war in the narrow sense.

Methodology

During the initial stage of our research, we closely monitored the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in authoritative English-language media sources (primarily *The Guardian*, *BBC*, *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *Reuters*, *Associated Press*, *Politico*) to identify lexical and semantic neologisms. Therefore, we compiled a list of 30 potentially neological units. Subsequently, we conducted a more comprehensive analysis of their media usage to determine the extent of their significance and novelty. In terms of significance, some units were dismissed as being too specialized and having only marginal importance for the global war discourse (e.g., *Wagner line*). Additionally, we excluded the terms that lacked recurrent use in English-language sources and thus could be regarded as occasionalisms rather than neologisms (examples include *to be Ukrained*, *russo-go-homia*). By doing so, we focused our attention on the lexical units that gained substantial circulation in official and media discourse on the Russia-Ukraine war, thereby contributing to the information warfare between the conflicting parties.

To verify the novelty and recurrence of the selected units, they were searched in one of the most robust English-language corpora, the NOW Corpus (Corpus of News on the Web) (Davies, 2016-). In many cases, the corpus data were also instrumental in providing an immediate glimpse into the origin of the word and the predominant context of its usage. For example, the query results for *missile terrorism* (see Fig. 1) make it clear that it was mainly propagated by Ukrainian officials starting in May 2022. With regard to *grain war* (see Fig. 2), the corpus data clearly indicate that the first usage can be attributed to the German Foreign Minister.

When exploring semantic neologisms and re-actualized lexical units, the NOW corpus proved valuable in establishing their newly acquired shades of meaning by facilitating the analysis of their contextual environment.

For example, the entries returned for *digital iron curtain* reveal the new contextual valency it gained in 2022 amid the discussion of Russian technological restrictions. It started to be used extensively with words denoting breaking or bypassing the restrictions, in stark contrast with the previous timeframes.

22-07-28 IN	news18.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	across war-scarred Ukraine Thursday left several dead in attacks President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described as " missile terrorism "
22-10-21 AU	afr.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	battlefield, so will Putin. # Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko says Russia's drone and missile terrorism has one objective in mind: the complet
22-06-28 IE	irishtimes.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	May. -- Bloomberg 91791504 Kyiv decries' missile terrorism as 21 people remain missing in ruins of Kremenchuk building # By Da
22-06-28 IE	irishtimes.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Motuzanyk described Russia's intensification of long-range strikes on his country's cities as " missile terrorism against the civilian
22-05-05 GB	independent.co.uk	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	# Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba has accused Russia of " resorting to the missile terrorism " tactics in order to spread fe
22-05-05 GB	express.co.uk	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	depots. # Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba accused Moscow of " resorting to the missile terrorism tactics in order to spre
22-05-04 CA	cp24.com (1)	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	. # Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba accused Russia of " resorting to the missile terrorism tactics in order to spread fear :
22-05-04 CA	cp24.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	using' missile terrorism ' in wide attacks Share: Text: # LVIV, Ukraine
22-07-23 US	New York Post	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	in the east, in the west there's still curfew, alcohol restrictions and missile terrorism . Places like Lviv and Kyiv face four to five air-rz
22-05-04 US	fairfieldcurrent.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	damage. # Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba accused Russia of " resorting to the missile terrorism tactics in order to spre
22-05-05 US	aljazeera.com (1)	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	down on peaceful Ukrainian cities. They want to break us down with their missile terrorism . But the only thing that will break down
22-05-05 US	aljazeera.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Ukraine, Wednesday, May 4, 2022Andriy Andriyenko/AP Ukraine accuses Russia of missile terrorism # Attacks were reported near
22-07-08 US	nypost.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	, I met with the chairman of Odessa's Regional Council, who predicted more missile terrorism against the coast. # Crucially, the wa

Fig. 1 Query results for *missile terrorism* in the NOW corpus (as queried December 30, 2022)

22-05-19 KE	kbc.co.ke	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	making a difficult situation even worse on Wednesday. # " Russia has launched a grain war , stoking a global food crisis, " Berlin's top diplomat
22-05-14 NG	independent.ng	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	" Russia made a conscious decision to turn the war against Ukraine into a' grain war ,' " said the German minister. This, she claimed, is
22-05-19 NG	dailynigerian.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Ukrainian ports and destroying silos, streets, and railroads, Russia has launched a grain war , stoking a global food crisis, " Baerbock said at a f
22-05-14 US	CNN	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q) # Russia has deliberately decided to extend the military war against Ukraine into a grain war , German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock s
22-05-14 US	CNN	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	" it said. Russia has deliberately extended its Ukraine invasion into a " grain war , " German foreign minister says # From CNN's Inke Kappeler i
22-05-14 US	politico.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	me personally, " she added. # Baerbock accused Russia of waging a " grain war " -- not only against Ukraine but against " many countries in th

Fig. 2 Query results for *grain war* in the NOW corpus (as queried December 30, 2022)

22-04-05 CA	thestar.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	hearing experts on cable spitballing ideas for how we might penetrate the " digital iron curtain " and convince Russians
22-03-04 US	wired.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	do that, Russia will retaliate -- cutting off ordinary Russians behind a digital iron curtain . # Until Friday, the only US tech
22-03-15 US	nbcnews.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	supposed to be a global network, not one divided by a " digital iron curtain . " # Experts said Russia is likely to turn to Ch
22-03-18 US	wral.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Arnold Schwarzenegger and the State Department are trying to pierce Putin's digital Iron Curtain # CNN -- The informat
22-03-18 US	wral.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	But the goal shared by a range of actors trying to pierce the digital iron curtain is to chip away, cumulatively, at Russian
22-03-22 US	theatlantic.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Russians directly with information about the war. " We are bypassing the digital iron curtain , " a Squad303 spokesperso
22-03-22 US	theatlantic.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	though, international news organizations are trying to exploit gaps within this new digital iron curtain to reach the Russ
22-03-22 US	theatlantic.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	34054548 How Western News Is Getting Around Putin's Digital Iron Curtain # As Russian forces continue their brutal in
22-03-25 US	washingtonpost.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	offices indefinitely earlier this month. # Spotify's announcement adds to a digital iron curtain building around Russia, as
22-03-26 US	dallasnews.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	one of Russia's glasnost-inspired independent media. He also has created a digital Iron Curtain to block Russians' acces
22-03-29 US	latimes.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	audiences... international news organizations are trying to exploit gaps within this new digital iron curtain to reach the f
22-03-31 US	nytimes.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	of independent journalists -- to make the samizdat work, to break this digital Iron Curtain which could happen in Russia
22-03-04 US	Forbes	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	online. # Moves like these have been described as contributing to a digital iron curtain that's now descending around R
22-03-04 US	The Verge on MSN.com	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	accumulating over the past week, and are slowly forming something of a digital iron curtain between Russia and the We
22-03-27 US	CNN	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	88986385 # (CNN Business) A digital Iron Curtain may be descending on Russia, as President Vladimir Putin struggles to
22-03-27 US	CBS News	🔍 🔍 🔍	Q	Bakersfield. 88987326 Breaking through Russia's digital Iron Curtain # In the fight against disinformation, this is the for

Fig. 3 A fragment of query results for *digital iron curtain* in the NOW corpus (as queried December 30, 2022)

At the same time, the quantitative metrics provided by the corpus were less useful for the purposes of our study due to the random and inexhaustible selection of data it contained. Therefore, we paid attention to the number of query results only where there was a significant disparity in usage between two or more variants of the same term or between time periods before and after February 24, 2022.

Apart from analyzing the corpus data, we also examined the use of the identified neologisms in various web sources to trace their origins, assess their reception in the media, and explore cross-language variations where applicable. When discussing humorous neologisms, we paid close attention to the metaphorical mappings and cultural reappropriation processes that characterize the linguistic creativity inspired by the Russia-Ukraine war. Our primary focus remained on understanding the pragmatic and communicative value of the identified neologisms in shaping the global discourse on the war and its broader implications.

Results and Discussion

Lexical neologisms

This subsection summarizes our findings regarding the lexical units that were coined after the breakout of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022.

Missile terrorism / missile terror

In April 2022, when the Russian Army suffered heavy losses and struggled to advance, it escalated indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets, resulting in many casualties. Ukrainian officials dubbed this strategy *missile terrorism / missile terror* (Ukr. *ракетний тероризм / ракетний терор*), as instead of pursuing military goals, it was intended solely to sow fear and panic among the population. In May, these neologisms were picked up in English-language media, with *missile terror* being much more prevalent (124 versus 15 occurrences in the NOW corpus). From October 10, 2022, when Russia initiated a series of fierce attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure, there was a sharp increase in their usage in both Ukrainian and English-language media. However, in the latter case, *missile terror / missile terrorism* featured throughout 2022 almost exclusively in the context of references to Ukrainian officials (namely, President Volodymyr Zelensky, Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba, Minister of Defense Oleksii Reznikov). Nonetheless, we were able to identify several articles where they are used independently as part of the authorial discourse (Sabina-Joja, 2022) or with reference to European officials (“Scholz: Russian air attacks”, 2022). The propagation of neologisms *missile terrorism / missile terror* aimed to draw the attention of the world community to the lawless actions of the Russian military and underscore the importance of providing stronger air defense systems to Ukraine.

Grain war, grain deal, grain corridor

The Russia-Ukraine war severely jeopardized the world’s food security, with Ukrainian ships being unable to export piled-up grain for five months after the start of the invasion. The situation was often referred to as the *grain blockade* and compared to Stalin’s terror of starvation in the 1930s (Hoffman, 2022). Another neologism frequently featured in the media in this context was *grain war*, used emphatically by the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock urging Putin to “stop the grain war that is driving hunger across the globe” (Baerbock, 2022). In late July, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, adopted by Ukraine and Russia with the mediation of the UN and Turkey, enabled the renewal of grain supply from Ukraine to other countries, thus alleviating the food crisis and reducing the prices for this vital staple. The initiative received extensive coverage in the media under various names, including *grain deal*, *grain export deal*, *grain agreement*, *grain initiative*. Particularly, in September 2022, it came into the spotlight again because of Vladimir Putin’s threats to revise the agreement on account of “cheating” on the Ukrainian side, thus *The Guardian* headline: “Putin threatens to tear up fragile Ukraine grain deal in bellicose speech” (Roth, 2022). Safe passages from Ukraine for grain-laden ships came to be known as *grain corridors* or *grain export corridors*. The widespread and repeated use of these neologisms in the press helped highlight the gravity of the food security crisis caused by the war and the efforts aimed at preventing it.

Putinflation

Shortly after the war started, a global rise in prices and growing inflation became noticeable. Among many other terms used in the media to describe this process was the neologism *Putinflation* – a blend of “Putin” and “inflation”, which straightforwardly associates the inflation with the actions of the Russian president. Thus, a Euronews article features this term when discussing a series of crises facing the world: “We are experiencing an energy crisis, a military defense crisis, a persistent post-COVID crisis, and now ‘Putinflation’: a commodity price

crisis hurting the most vulnerable” (Tubiana, 2022). The word seems to have been coined in Polish (*putinflacja*), and no later than May 2022, its equivalent appeared in English, mostly in the context of controversial and emotion-laden discussions of the fundamental causes of soaring prices. Particularly, appealing to *Putinflation* is criticized by some as an attempt to lay the blame for internal policy failures on external factors (Harper, 2022; “Fact Check: It’s Bidenflation, Not Putinflation”, 2022). This sheds light on the numerous linguopragmatic implications that war-related neologisms may have as they frame economic or political processes in a specific way, which can potentially give rise to manipulation.

Sanctionistas, Contras

Russian aggression against Ukraine provoked a strong response from Western countries¹, with significant sanctions being imposed upon Russia in various domains. However, EU states greatly differed in their extent of support for these drastic measures, which gave rise to another notable neologism. Countries that advocated harsh sanctions against Russia (namely, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were dubbed *Sanctionistas*, making use of the Spanish suffix *-ista* (coming from *Sandinista* – a supporter of Nicaraguan leader Augusto Sandino in the 1980–90s), which has proven productive in English neology (as exemplified by *fashionista*, *frugalista*, etc.). The countries that were less supportive of severe sanctions (Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria) were dubbed *Contras*, as illustrated by a *Daily Mail* article (Phillips, 2022): “An internal battle within the EU is now raging between the ‘Sanctionistas’, countries that are pro-sanctions, and the *Contras* – countries prioritising their own economies.” While this example demonstrates the usage of *Sanctionista* as a noun, it can also function as an adjective (“a *Sanctionista* country”). These neologisms mostly appeared in English-language media from March to August 2022, when the discussions of sanctions were most vivid. However, they may still experience a resurgence later on. Remarkably, this term has no Ukrainian equivalent, given that the suffix *-ista* has never made its way into the Ukrainian language.

Pro-Russian neutrality

Whereas most member states of the United Nations condemned Russia as the aggressor when the war broke out, some countries refrained from taking sides. The state that received the most spotlight in this respect was China, which decided to prioritize its close political and economic alignment with Russia by refusing to denounce its actions directly. This position was dubbed *pro-Russian neutrality* by China researcher and former US advisor on Asia policy Evan Medeiros (Hille, 2022), referring to China’s silent backing of Russia’s actions while formally declaring neutrality and not supplying weapons to the Russian army. The neologism, which appeared in *The Financial Times* three days into the invasion, quickly gained traction and eventually featured in multiple news outlets, including *Politico*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Guardian*, *The Diplomat*, *Quartz*, etc. Its oxymoronic and catchy nature contributed to its wide reception in English-language media in the context of critical discussion of China’s position.

Zelensky-washing / Ukraine-washing

A few months into the war, some European leaders’ visits to Ukraine and assurances of unwavering support for its cause came to be perceived as attempts to restore their tarnished personal reputations by riding the wave of the Ukrainian momentum. This phenomenon was dubbed in the media *Zelensky-washing*, or *Ukraine-washing*. The suffix *-washing* is one of the many hyperproductive suffixes in English that have become detached from a word (in this case, *whitewashing*) and received a life of their own, being used for new coinages. It conveys the meaning of deceitful actions that a person, company, or government undertakes to keep up the appearances of honesty and progressive actions (e.g., *greenwashing* is used to describe actions seemingly intended to mitigate ecological crisis but actually devoid of any value). A *Euronews* article entitled “How ‘Ukraine-washing’ became the new gambit for embattled European politicians” discusses this phenomenon in relation to Romanian, Polish, French, and Slovakian politicians who have all “sought relief abroad by hitching their wagon and public image to that of

¹ The terms “Western countries” and “the West”, used throughout this article, refer to the commonly accepted definition that includes the US, Canada, member states of the EU, the UK, Norway, Iceland, Australia, and New Zealand.

Ukraine's heroic resistance" (Gherasim, 2022). Another article, published in *The Telegraph*, humorously claims that the "reflected glory" of President Zelensky, widely hailed as a hero, is used as a "disinfectant" for troubled political leaders, with the former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson being the most illustrative example (Cumming, 2022). *Zelensky-washing* and *Ukraine-washing* aptly pin the label on image-saving political practices that involve Ukraine, while further emphasizing the far-reaching implications of the war for the international arena.

Ukrainian exodus / Ukraine exodus

The Russia-Ukraine war forced millions of Ukrainians to flee to safety in other countries, mostly within Europe, placing an immense burden on its economic resources. Numerous news outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New Yorker*, described the mass departure of Ukrainians as the *Ukrainian exodus*, or *Ukraine exodus*. The metaphorical term *exodus*, which originated from a biblical story about the Israelites' departure from Egypt, is used to convey the unprecedented severity of the current displacement crisis more dramatically. Notably, the neologism *Ukrainian exodus / Ukraine exodus* featured extensively in opinion and analytical articles that criticized what they perceived as the European Union's selective treatment of migrants from different parts of the world (see, for example, Berlinger, 2022).

Archivocide

The heavy shelling and incessant missile attacks launched upon Ukraine engendered the fear that important heritage and crucial historical documents related to the Ukrainian culture might be destroyed, either intentionally (as not being consistent with Russian ideology) or unintentionally (as collateral damage in the bombardment). This phenomenon received the name *archivocide* (from *archive* and Latin *cedo* 'to kill', by analogy with *fratricide*, *genocide*, etc.). The term was coined by historian Daria Mattingly and first featured in a much-cited article by *The Guardian* (Reid, 2022), which highlighted Ukrainian scholars' rush to scan significant documents and safeguard key artifacts of the Ukrainian culture amid the military chaos. From the linguistic viewpoint, it is remarkable that the concept of *archivocide* existed prior to the war: we were able to identify the Ukrainian and French equivalents (*архівовицид*, *l'archivocide*) being occasionally used in the mid-2010s in various contexts. However, in English, its equivalent first appeared only after the 2022 Russian invasion.

Borscht war

The cultural confrontation between Russia and Ukraine extended to the cuisine. However trivial it may sound against the backdrop of military fighting, the battle also raged over a traditional beetroot dish called borsch / borscht (Ukr. борщ). While the dish is popular in both Ukraine and Russia, in Soviet times, it was always regarded as having Ukrainian origins. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Russia started claiming the dish as its own heritage. The sparring – dubbed in the media the *war for borscht*, or the *borscht war* (Ukr. війна за борщ) – was resolved in July, when UNESCO added the culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, following a fast-tracked procedure in light of the Russian invasion. The Ukrainian Minister of Culture famously tweeted: "Victory in the war for borscht is ours!" (Muniz, 2022). Terms like *war for borscht*, while seemingly flippant and playful, promoted the Ukrainian cause in the media by underscoring the importance of long-lasting cultural and identity issues in this military conflict.

Semantic neologisms

This subsection discusses the lexical units that existed previously in their current lexical form but acquired new meanings in the context of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war.

Deputinization

The most prominent word that received a broader meaning in the course of the war is *deputinization* (Br. *deputinisation*). Its Russian equivalent, депутинизация, has been around at least since 2016 (see, for example, Sokolov, 2016), being used primarily by Russian opposition politicians and thinkers to refer to the prospect of overcoming Putin's grip on power in Russia and moving on to a more democratic type of government. In

English-language resources, *deputinization* featured only occasionally before the war, as exemplified in Motyl (2021), where it concerns the political processes within Russia. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 laid bare the true scale of Putin's grasp over Europe, suggesting that it also needed to carry out *deputinization* as the process of breaking free from the Kremlin's ubiquitous influence. Precisely in this meaning, the word was used by the prime ministers of Latvia ("Latvian Minister", 2022) and Poland (Burke, 2022). Democratic Bulgaria party co-leader Hristo Ivanov applied this term to the political and economic life of Bulgaria (Nikolov, Montanari & Kurmayer, 2022). At the same time, the primary meaning of *deputinization* as the process needed within Russia has not become less relevant in the context of the unfolding events. In a March interview with the UK's Channel 4 (covered by the influential US newspaper *Newsweek*), Russian writer Mikhail Shishkin called for deputinization of Russia, highlighting its relation to destalinization the country has never implemented (Brady, 2022).

Digital blockade

Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression expanded into cyberspace with a massive technological campaign led by the Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov. As one of his initiatives, he advocated for the "digital blockade" of Russia, striving to cut Russia off from the global internet and economy by appealing to big tech corporations (Bergengruen, 2022). The campaign had only partial success but sparked a lively discussion of the feasibility and legitimacy of such drastic measures. *Digital blockade* is a long-established term meaning intentional restrictions or disruptions of digital communications imposed by authorities within the country to establish censorship and increase political control (as exemplified in China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia). While *digital blockade* (along with *cyber blockade*) has been occasionally used in relation to effective cyberattacks targeted by one country at another (Estonia and Georgia being famous examples), Mykhailo Fedorov started using and propagating the term in an unprecedentedly broad sense, which involved non-state actors (multinational technology corporations) withdrawing from the country. At the same time, *digital blockade* continued to be used in its conventional meaning as well. For instance, "But experts say Russia's digital blockade is far less effective than what Putin and the Kremlin would like" (Nover, 2022). In this context, *digital blockade* refers to the digital restrictions imposed by Russia within its own borders, aimed at maintaining control over the population – a strategy desired by the authorities. This stands in contrast to the concept of a digital blockade of Russia sought by Ukrainian officials. Therefore, in 2022, we observed the simultaneous usage of this unit in two different, and in this context, opposite meanings.

Wagnerite

The word *wagnerite* has an established meaning in English, referring to a devoted enthusiast of music composed by Richard Wagner. However, since the onset of the war, it has taken on a completely different meaning in the media. It is now used to describe a member of the Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary organization that played a prominent role in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Wagner Group is believed to be named after Richard Wagner, who was reportedly Hitler's favorite composer ("What is the Wagner Group?", 2022). In addition to *wagnerites*, these mercenaries are also sometimes referred to as *wagnerians* or simply *wagners*. These words have gained significant attention in the media since the beginning of the war due to the atrocities associated with the group and their ambiguous legal status.

Russian exodus

Military setbacks suffered by Russians in Ukraine urged the Kremlin to call up partial mobilization. After September 21, thousands of men fled Russia to avoid the draft, their most popular destinations being Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, Finland, and Mongolia. The massive flow of people out of the country was often dubbed in the media the *Russian exodus*, or *Russian mobilization exodus* (Balmforth, 2022). As evident from the NOW corpus data, this unit was occasionally used before 2022 to signify quite diverse processes. Thus, it featured in 2011 with reference to the trend of Russians relocating to Goa (with no political implications), while in 2013 it referred to the evacuation of Russian nationals from Syria. With the start of the 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine, it acquired a more stable and recurrent meaning of Russians massively fleeing the country for political reasons.

Re-actualized lexical units

This subsection covers the lexical units that existed prior to the war with roughly the same meaning but gained new relevance and much broader reception, as evidenced by a spike in their media usage. Thus, in the course of the war, they entered the stage of institutionalization in their establishment as neologisms.

Ruscism / ruscism

Undoubtedly, the most prominent word that came into focus during the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war is *ruscism* / *Ruscism* (alternative spelling *rashism*, Укр. *рашизм*) – a blend of “Russian” and “fascism”, denoting the expansionist, ultranationalist ideology of the Russian Federation that reached its apogee in the invasion of Ukraine. It is widely misrepresented in the media as a new word minted by Ukrainians in response to the enemy’s aggression (see, for example, “Ruscism: The new word”, 2022). However, a closer look makes it clear that *ruscism* has a long history, going back to the First Chechen War. In the form *русизм* (*russism*) it was coined in 1996 by Dzhokhar Dudayev, the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, who meant by it an anti-human ideology grounded on the Russian chauvinistic worldview and the world domination complex (Dudayev, 1995). Having been scarcely used previously, it got a new lease of life in its slightly altered form and became widespread in English-language media following the Russian invasion in 2022, mostly due to active promotion by Ukrainian officials and users. Based on *ruscism*, Ukrainians have also created the term *дерашизація* (the English equivalent would be *deruscization* / *derashization*) as a play on “denazification” – the proclaimed purpose of the Russian invasion.

Schizofascism

While the Russian ideology underpinning the invasion displays many fascist tendencies, the leitmotif of Russian propaganda is counteracting fascism in Ukraine and the West. This tendency has been named *schizofascism* (from “schizophrenia” – a mental disorder characterized by faulty perception of reality – and “fascism”) by the prominent American historian Timothy Snyder, who claims: “Fascists calling other people “fascists” is fascism taken to its illogical extreme as a cult of unreason. [...] Calling others fascists while being a fascist is the essential Putinist practice” (Snyder, 2022). The term first appeared in his 2018 book *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, where this phenomenon is traced starting with 2014. However, it was only with the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 that *schizofascism* gained broad reception in political media and was picked up by Ukrainian resources under the equivalent translation *шизофашизм*.

Ukraine fatigue

Soaring gas prices, along with record inflation and the food crisis, undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the world’s solidarity with Ukraine waned significantly by the third month of the invasion. This tendency was often described in the media as *Ukraine fatigue* (built upon the model “country + war fatigue”, similarly to *Iraq fatigue*, *Afghanistan fatigue*, etc.). It appeared in 2014, in the context of the fighting in Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea annexation. During that time, it mostly referred to the stalled international response to Russian aggression after the Minsk II agreement. However, prior to the full-scale invasion, it was used only rarely and inconsistently, while in 2022, *Ukraine fatigue* featured in the headlines of the world’s leading media outlets and became a staple of political forums. This neologism was effective in conveying the natural phenomenon of blunted sympathy for Ukraine after a period of excited and enthusiastic support. Most famously, it was used by then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on his second trip to Kyiv on June 17: “When Ukraine fatigue is setting in, it is very important to show that we are with them for the long haul and we are giving them the strategic resilience that they need” (Manancourt, 2022). Johnson’s use of *Ukraine fatigue* significantly popularized it in both English-language and Ukrainian-language media.

Russian war machine / Putin’s war machine

Another lexical unit that experienced a resurgence in 2022 is *Russian war machine* (alternatively known as *Russia’s war machine* or *Vladimir Putin’s war machine*). It captures the huge collective military power, technological capabilities, and infrastructure of Russia, which make it a formidable enemy to stop. In the NOW corpus, the variant (*Vladimir*) *Putin’s war machine* is represented much more widely than the other two (737 occurrences versus

219 for *Russia's war machine* and 294 for *Russian war machine*). This personalization may be indicative of the media's striving to lay the blame for the war on Russia's president rather than the country as a whole. A contextual analysis of these units in the NOW corpus (in 2022) reveals their frequent association with the verbs *to fund*, *to finance*, *to sponsor*, *to pay for*, as well as their opposites *to defund*, *to deplete*, and *to starve*. These associations highlight discussions of the effects of trade restrictions and sanctions on Russia. The underlying analogy of the military complex with a machine has given way to many metaphorical expressions, e.g., *to defuel Russia's war machine*, *a cog in Russia's war machine*, *wheels falling off the Russian war machine*, among others.

Stalinization / Re-Stalinization

The terms *Stalinization* or *re-Stalinization* (Br. *Stalinisation* / *Re-Stalinisation*) refer to the rehabilitation of Joseph Stalin's politics (Gregory, 2018) and / or adopting his governance methods (Khapaeva, 2016). Prior to the war, their usage was limited to scientific literature and political analysis, whereas in 2022, they started to make headlines of leading media outlets. Thus, an article in *The Economist* argues that by framing his military 'operation' as de-Nazifying Ukraine, state television is effectively re-Stalinizing Russia ("The Stalinisation of Russia", 2022). The terms gained traction as they served to convey the growing resemblance between Vladimir Putin's repressions and Joseph Stalin's tyranny ("A tale of two dictators", 2022). Consequently, the focus of the term's semantics has shifted towards the emulation of Stalin's policies rather than the mere glorification of his historical figure.

Digital iron curtain

The metaphorical term *digital iron curtain*, denoting a virtual barrier between countries or regions, has been in use for approximately two decades. In 2019–2020, it was mostly applied to China in the context of its push towards cyber sovereignty amidst tensions with the US. In 2022, the media overwhelmingly applied this label to the severe network isolation that Russia entered after blocking Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. An analysis of the data in the NOW corpus reveals a noteworthy shift in the contextual usage of this unit in 2022 compared to previous years: it is frequently preceded by verbs such as *to penetrate*, *to pierce through*, *to tear a hole in*, which build upon the underlying metaphorical mapping of the barrier as a curtain. The concept of breaching the restrictions is related to the perceived importance of making true information about the war available to Russians (Bear et al., 2022).

Humorous neologisms

Despite the pain and terror brought by the war, it also sparked the creation of numerous humorous neologisms that served to relieve tension, on the one hand, and attract more attention to the conflict, on the other. Among them, the one that gained the most resonance is *orcs* (Ukr. *орки*) – the label Ukrainians pinned on Russian soldiers and the Kremlin-supporting Russian population. This designation is an allusion to the brutish humanoid monsters that serve Dark Lords of Middle-earth in the legendarium of J.R.R. Tolkien. The cultural reappropriation of Tolkien's imagery occasionally goes even further, with the name *Mordor* being applied to Russia and *Sauron* to Vladimir Putin. Ukrainian officials and the President have actively contributed to the spread and extensive discussions of these metaphorical designations in English-language sources by eagerly using them in interviews and announcements.

Some informal neologisms have turned into memes, trending mostly on social media but also featured on technology websites. Prominent examples are *Saint Javelin* – the image of a saint-like female figure carrying a Javelin – and *North Atlantic Fella Organization* ("NAFO", a play on "NATO") – a group of Twitter users focused on counteracting Russian propaganda and trolling on the Internet. Both memes have been used efficiently for the purposes of fundraising for the Ukrainian military. A few viral neologisms with a humorous spin feature the name of Stepan Bandera: *Bandera smoothie* (Ukrainian *Бандера-смузи*) for Molotov cocktail, *Banderomobil* / *Banderacar* (Ukrainian *бандеромобіль*) for a military off-road vehicle used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) – one of the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 20th century – is not largely revered in today's Ukraine, apart from rare ultranationalist groups. However, Soviet (and subsequently Russian) propaganda has always propelled his figure as a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism they intended to eradicate. Thus, the pejorative label *banderites* (Russian *бандеровцы*, Ukrainian *бандерівці*) that Russians pin

on Ukrainians who do not strive for “unity” with them. Instead of being offended by this, Ukrainians have reappropriated the Russian Bandera-revolving rhetoric, using his name in multiple colloquialisms and social media memes, which serve to demonstrate to Russians the futility and folly of their fear of Stepan Bandera, a person turned into a political myth by propaganda.

In the Ukrainian-language segment, users entertained themselves by coining comic verbs derived from the names of leading EU politicians: макронити (“to macronize”) was suggested to mean “to carry out long and pointless telephone talks” (referring to the French President’s frequent calls to Vladimir Putin at the beginning of the war), while валяти Шольца (“to play Scholz”) was coined to express the idea of promising something for a long time, without actually giving it (a reference to German hesitation with providing weapons to Ukraine). In January 2023, amid strong pressure exerted on Germany to supply tanks to Ukraine, the latter found its English counterpart: British historian Timothy Garton Ash suggested the term *Scholzing* meaning “communicate good intentions only to use/identify/invent every conceivable reason to delay and/or prevent them” (“Scholzing – British historian makes fun”, 2023).

Also worthy of attention are catchy monikers for famous and notorious personalities related to the war. In March 2022, the Ukrainian-language segment of the Internet glorified “the Ghost of Kyiv” (Український привид Києва) – a fictitious character embodying numerous Ukrainian pilots who destroyed the enemy’s aircraft over Kyiv. Though the legendary figure turned out to be mythical, Ukrainian media used it to give the nation’s morale a much-needed boost (Bubola, 2022). Other war-related personal monikers that featured in the news include “the butcher of Bucha” (Russian lieutenant colonel Azatbek Omurbekov who oversaw major atrocities in the town of Bucha near Kyiv) and “babushka Z” (an elderly Ukrainian woman waving a Soviet flag who became a symbol for Russian propaganda until she switched sides). Because of the fact that Russian Orthodox Church’s leader Patriarch Kirill Gundayev explicitly justified the Russian invasion, he was dubbed by Pope Francis “Putin’s altar boy” – the label that was picked up by authoritative media outlets including *The Washington Post*, *The Forbes*, *The Daily Mail* and was used even one month after the Pope’s remark (see Saul, 2022), which signifies its unusual media persistence as for an occasional comment.

The media space in 2022 was also awash with relatively recent lexical formations based on the surname of Vladimir Putin, including *Putler* (from “Putin” and “Hitler”), *putinomics* (from “Putin” and “economics”), *Putinesque* and *Putinland*. The latter was first used back in 2006 by the Russian opposition journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was killed by the regime. In 2022, it resurfaced with new force and was most remarkably featured in the German-language book *Putinland. Der imperiale Wahn, die russische Opposition und die Verblendung des Westens* by the Russian opposition politician Leonid Wolkow, where he traces Russia’s slide into imperialist dictatorship. It can be surmised that the war will further catalyze the entrenchment of Putin-based neologisms, reflecting the degree of notoriety this person has achieved.

Conclusion

As an event of global significance that overwhelmed the world, the war in Ukraine has become a subject of extensive debate in the media, with new lexical units being coined or re-actualized along the way. A large part of the neologisms reflects the political crisis and division caused by the war, especially due to the heavy economic losses it entails (*pro-Russian neutrality*, *Putinflation*, *sanctionistas vs. contras*). One of the most widely used neologisms refers to the tactics of terror that Russia resorts to, being unable to gain an advantage on the battlefield (*missile terror*). *Archivocide* and *borscht war*, while seemingly unrelated, both represent the cultural aspect of the war, which is rooted in centuries-long identity issues that are to be finally resolved now. From the linguistic viewpoint, it is remarkable that three of the identified neologisms are modeled upon existing and quite productive morphological patterns (*sanctionista*, *archivocide*, *Zelensky-washing*), which serves to confirm the crucial role of analogy in English word-formation.

However, besides lexical and semantic neologisms, also quite illustrative are the units that already existed but were propelled to prominence in the English-language media discourse only with the start of the war. These include *ruscism*, *schizofascism*, *stalinization*, *digital iron curtain*, all conveying the growing totalitarian tendencies

in Russia and the distorted worldview it is trying to propagate. The spread of these terms has been important in pinpointing the overarching social-political catastrophe engulfing Russia and thus putting the war in the broader context of the struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. The neologisms and re-actualized units identified here can thus serve as a window, providing a glimpse into the changing socio-political landscape of today's world. Social media during the war exploded with dozens of humorous neologisms, many of them based on references to well-known political figures or organizations. Such units, although seemingly flippant and restricted to social media only, have been extremely helpful in boosting the morale of Ukrainians, invigorating their fundraising campaigns, and counteracting Russian massive-scale disinformation and vilification efforts. We believe it is important to trace the further evolution of neologisms related to the Russia-Ukraine war and its global implications since they are an integral part of information warfare and media framing, shaping public attitudes and beliefs about the conflict.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Santrauka

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Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo neologizmai kaip informacinio karo priemonė žiniasklaidoje

Straipsnis skirtas išsamiai anglišių žodžių ir frazių, plačiai paplitusių žiniasklaidoje per pirmuosius 10 Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo mėnesius, analizei. Išskirtos trys leksinių vienetų kategorijos: leksiniai neologizmai (nauji dariniai), tokie kaip *sanctionista*, *Zelensky-washing*, *Putinflation* ir kt.; semantiniai neologizmai – vienetai, egzistavę ir prieš karą, tačiau karo kontekste įgiję naujų reikšmių – pavyzdžiui, *deputinization*, *digital blockade* ir kt.; vienetai, kurie iki 2022-ųjų buvo naudojami retai ir nenuosekliai, tačiau karo kontekste buvo naujai aktualizuoti, pavyzdžiui, *ruscism*, *stalinization* ir kt. Kai kurie iš analizuojamų vienetų iš pradžių atsirado ukrainiečių arba rusų kalbose, o vėliau išplito į kitas kalbas (pavyzdžiui, *missile terrorism*), o kiti vartojami tik anglų kalboje ir neturi atitikmenų ukrainiečių ar rusų kalbose (pavyzdžiui, *sanctionista*). Naujienų ir socialinių tinklų medžiagoje galima atsekti šių žodžių ir frazių etimologiją, jų pasikartojimą ir vartojimo kontekstą, taip pat jų pragmatinę vertę formuojant Vakaruose viešąją poziciją apie karą Ukrainoje. Taip pat atkreipiamas dėmesys į šiuo laikotarpiu socialiniuose tinkluose pasirodžiusius humoristinius okazionalizmus, memus ir slapyvardžius, kurie karo metu malšino psichologinę įtampą ir kartu prisidėjo prie informacinio karo bei lėšų rinkimo Ukrainos kariuomenės reikmėms. Straipsnis padeda geriau suprasti žiniasklaidoje veikiančius emociškai įkrautus ir potencialiai skaldančius politinių temų kūrimo mechanizmus.

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